

# Ji Myung Kim, violinist/educator

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## Diversity and Inclusion

My initiatives in promoting diversity and inclusion in academia is grounded in my personal experience as a cultural and racial minority, my current role as the leader of Symphonic Honors Initiative Program (SHIP) at Eastern Illinois University, and my life-long commitment to nurturing a genuine growth in my students as musicians and people.

Born and raised in South Korea, where cultural and racial diversity hardly existed back in the eighties, my early years were memorable but nothing spectacular. Then, when I was just fourteen, my parents decided to send me to America where I can study music and grow as a person in a much more diverse environment. Nearly thirty years later, as I educate my students, I am able to acknowledge that my life as a Korean in the US has been a series of learning experiences and growth, and I attribute that to my eclectic encounters with people from vastly different backgrounds. It has been educational, inspirational, and truly humbling.

My experience in diversity can be divided into three phases: First, my high school years at a private Quaker school in Philadelphia. Secondly, my undergraduate and graduate years at Indiana University where my peers represented every continent. And lastly, my freelancing years in New York City, the melting-pot habitat for musicians.

The single most important life lesson I have learned from experiencing so much diversity in people is the idea of balance. More specifically, maintaining a healthy balance between my own beliefs, ideas, and philosophies and those of others around me. This comprehensive outlook on life is embedded into my identity as a musician and as an educator.

The Symphonic Honors Initiative Program (SHIP) at Eastern Illinois gathers students, as well as community members, from various backgrounds, musical training, and at times, with certain physical and mental disabilities, to come together and learn how to play harmoniously in an orchestral setting. My job as a teacher is to help each student play and hear oneself in context of a bigger ensemble and to show them the importance of adjusting to their peers in order to create a collaborative sound. Furthermore, I encourage them to see that such environment is a microcosm of the world they will encounter after their college years.

My recruiting efforts toward building a diverse studio has involved organizing clinics and workshops (mostly virtual since the pandemic), engaging students from other districts in the state of Illinois, directing sectional rehearsals for various regional youth orchestras, and traveling every summer to Korea where I present a dozen performances as well as masterclasses at high schools and universities.

Currently, my violin/viola studio includes students from diverse backgrounds: students of color, international students, those with lower-income backgrounds, some mild physical disabilities, ADHD, and some on the autism spectrum. The broad spectrum of students' musical background inspires me then to diversify my pedagogical approach, and to create lessons plans that are specifically catered to each student's abilities and goals. Once again, it has been crucial to maintain a good balance between a more systematic approach under strict regimen with nurturing freedom for the students to experiment and explore their musical expression. In my lessons, no idea is invalid, and no expression is unimaginative. I foster the realization that as a musician, you must always be open to others' ideas and be ready to view art from perspectives other than your own, as that is the way to grow organically. In order to help my students grow musically, I often encourage them to experience other forms of arts such as architecture, painting, and other genres of music.

Diversity and inclusion are not just pedagogical imperatives but a candid reality of the world we live in. This is the way of life and the way to live as a musician in the twenty-first-century America.